

HEALTH MATTERS ARTICLE – Important Food Safety Tips for Grilling – (for 5/15/14). Submitted by the Needham Health Department

Summer is right around the corner! It's the season for picnics, cookouts, and other outdoor parties. But eating outdoors in warm weather presents a food safety challenge. Bacteria in food multiply faster at temperatures between 40°F and 140°F, so summer heat makes the basics of food safety especially important.

According to the Food and Drug Association's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, you can take the following steps noted below to help prevent the risk of your family and friends from coming down with a potential foodborne illness.

Wash hands.

It seems basic, but not everyone does it. Wash hands well and often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the bathroom and before cooking or eating. If you're in an outdoor setting with no bathroom, use a water jug, some soap, and paper towels. Consider carrying moist disposable towelettes for cleaning your hands.

Keep raw food separate from cooked food.

Don't use a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood for anything else unless the plate has first been washed in hot, soapy water. Keep utensils and surfaces clean.

Marinate/Defrost food in the refrigerator, not out on the counter.

And if you want to use some of the marinade as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a separate portion. Don't reuse marinade that contained raw meat.

Cook food thoroughly.

To kill any harmful bacteria that may be present, use a food thermometer. Hamburgers should be cooked to 160°F. If a thermometer is not available, make sure hamburgers are brown all the way through, not pink. Chicken should be cooked to at least 165°F. If you partially cook food in the microwave, oven or stove to reduce grilling time, do so immediately before the food goes on the hot grill.

Refrigerate and freeze food promptly.

It can be hard to remember while a party is going on, but food should not be left out of the cooler or off the grill for more than two hours. A good rule of thumb is to never leave food out for more than one hour when the temperature is above 90°F.

Keep hot food hot.

Hot food should be kept at or above 140°F. Hot food should be wrapped well and placed in an insulated container. If bringing hot take-out food such as fried chicken or barbecue to an outdoor party, eat it within two hours of purchase. In addition to bringing a grill and fuel for cooking to an outdoor location, remember to pack a food thermometer to check that your meat and poultry reach a safe internal temperature. When re-heating food at the outing, be sure it reaches 165°F.

Keep cold food cold.

Cold food should be held at or below 40°F. Foods like chicken salad and desserts that are in individual serving dishes can be placed directly on ice or in a shallow container set in a deep pan filled with ice. Drain off water as ice melts and replace ice frequently.

Bacteria are part of our environment. Where there is food there may be bacteria. Proper food handling and cooking is the best way to prevent foodborne illness. Generally, most at risk for developing foodborne illness are children, the elderly, pregnant women, and those who have chronic illnesses or compromised immune systems. **Remember the basic rules of grilling food safety - *keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.***

More information on food safety can be found on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Food Protection Program web site at - <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/environmental-health/food-safety/>. You can also contact the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555. Or check out the Food and Drug Administration food safety website at - <http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/default.htm>. You can also check out the Needham Health Department website for a list of previous articles at <http://www.needhamma.gov/Health>.